Professional Ethics in Geosciences Seminar, Fall 2023
GEO 145E (27870)

Syllabus

Instructor:
Prof. Joel Johnson (he/him/his), joelj@jsg.utexas.edu
EPS 3.136, but I will rarely be in my office.
Office hours: Wednesdays 2-3 (after class), https://utexas.zoom.us/j/5364780374. I am also teaching another class this semester and other students may be on the Zoom call at the same time. If you need a private meeting, email (joelj@jsg.utexas.edu).

Class meets ONLINE ONLY, using ZOOM, Wednesdays 12-2 pm. This 1-credit course only meets 7 times, August 23-October 18, with a possible makeup meeting October 25 if needed (or possibly beyond). We will not meet September 27, and probably will not meet October 11. Attendance at all is mandatory.

Class website: Canvas. ZOOM links for each class will be posted to Canvas. Papers to be read (and videos, etc.) will be available through Canvas. Assignments will be submitted through Canvas.

Overview: This one credit hour seminar for undergraduates will employ readings, written responses and group discussions to explore ethical questions in the geosciences. The course is entirely devoted to personal, professional and societal ethics related to the geosciences.

The course carries the ETHICS FLAG, which is designed to inform students “for making ethical decisions in your adult and professional life. Courses carrying this flag expose you to ethical issues and to the process of applying ethical reasoning in real-life situations” (https://ugs.utexas.edu/flags/students/about/ethics; https://ugs.utexas.edu/flags/objectives/ethics). The following are learning goals/objectives for the flag and course:

- Recognize ethical dimensions in real-life situations and diverse contexts.
- Identify the perspectives of various stakeholders in an ethical problem.
- Practice applying ethical decision-making and navigating codes of ethics.
- Advocate for ethical positions in real-life ethical problem.

Attendance: Because of the small number of classes, attendance at every class is important and mandatory. Plus because its online, mild illness shouldn’t prevent you from attending. If you have a known conflict or other issue that will affect your attendance for any class, let me know ahead of time. I realize that emergencies arise. If you have to miss class without advanced warning, communicate with me as soon as possible afterwards. I may (or may not) accommodate with a makeup assignment on a case by case basis.

Class Recordings: Because some discussions may cover sensitive subjects and to encourage everyone to communicate frankly, class discussions will not be recorded.
Grading: Assigned grades will be based 30% on ethical summaries and discussion questions written for each week (submitted electronically as Canvas assignments BEFORE the start of class), and 70% on active class participation, attendance, and possible makeup writing assignments. Plus/minus grades will be assigned. No exams.

By 9 pm the night BEFORE each class (including the first meeting), you will need to read articles for the week and submit a written assignment electronically through Canvas. Late submissions will not generally be accepted (though you can always talk to me). The writing assignment for each week will be posted to Canvas, and will typically include you writing out what you see as key ethical questions/concerns raised (implicitly or explicitly) by the articles, and also writing at least three discussion questions for the class to consider, which also explore the key ethical issues in the articles. You will use the questions to foster class discussions. These are not article summaries.

Writing is rarely perfect. If your writing assignment is solid, informative and meets all the requirements (including proper spelling, grammar and punctuation), it will get a 90% or 95%. Particularly interesting and insightful descriptions of ethical points and questions will get 100%.

Class participation means speaking up and contributing repeatedly during each and every group discussion to demonstrate that you read, pondered, and contextualized the readings each week. Also, your camera needs to be on during class for full participation. If you’re having a specific problem where camera use isn’t possible, let me know. In general it is your responsibility to have web access and hardware to fully participate.

Academic integrity: Written assignments will be processed by TurnItIn, a tool that compares submitted material to an archived database of published work to check for potential plagiarism. Plus, it also checks for AI writing, imperfectly! Other methods may also be used to determine if a paper is the student's original work.

Like TNT or printing presses, ChatGPT, HAL 9000, and similar generative AI systems are (arguably) just tools, which people (or other AIs?) can choose to use for ethical or unethical purposes. For some specific individual assignments you will be encouraged to use ChatGPT, but the default expectation for this course is that all work you turn in, and discussion comments you make verbally or through text, must be written by you alone, not with any help from any generative AI system. Only if an assignment explicitly says you can use ChatGPT is it acceptable. Plagiarism of text or specific ideas is also not acceptable.

Academic dishonesty may be investigated by the Dean of Students office, at my discretion (https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/index.php).

The University Code of Conduct, which is particularly relevant to an ethics class: The core values of the University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility.
Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. 
http://catalog.utexas.edu/general-information/the-university/#universitycodeofconduct

Readings will be posted to Canvas each week for the following week. These are likely topics, subject to change:

Aug. 23: What is science? What are geoethics?

Aug. 30: Microethics: Research fraud, statistics, and ChatGPT? CheatGPT?

Sept 6: Microethics: Sexism and sexual harassment in geoscience

Sept 13: Microethics: Racism, diversity and discrimination in geoscience

Sept 20: Macroethics: Prosecuting Italian seismologists and public communication of risk and uncertainty

Sept 27: No class

Oct 4: Macroethics: Climate change and worst case scenarios

Oct 11: No class, probably

Oct 18: Macroethics: Human impacts of cobalt mining

Oct 25: Makeup class day if a previous class needs to be canceled

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that would be helpful to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students, but I can only do so if you discuss your needs with me. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions, unless it pertains to sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking, in which case I am a mandatory reporter (see Title IX below).

Disability and Access (formerly SSD, Services for Students with Disabilities): Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact D&A, https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/ . I have had multiple undergraduates tell me that D&A accommodations helped them tremendously, and that they wish they had contacted the office earlier during their college career.

Please reach out to Student Emergency Services if you or your families are facing difficult or emergency situations: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an
examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.


**Title IX Reporting:** Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.

2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.

3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university’s relevant policies ([https://titleix.utexas.edu/relevant-policies/](https://titleix.utexas.edu/relevant-policies/)).

Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Senate Bill 212 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported. I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX related incidents that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit [http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/](http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/), contact the Title IX Office via email at titleix@austin.utexas.edu, or call 512-471-0419.

Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Senate Bill 212, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as sexual misconduct, including the types of sexual misconduct covered under Texas Senate Bill 212.

The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support survivors.